Professional Learning and Development in Schools

How well were school leaders determining Professional Learning and Development priorities and evaluating its impact?

ERO spoke with school leaders responsible for planning Professional Learning and Development (PLD) and looked at a variety of documents in 242 state or state-integrated schools (excluding kura) reviewed in Terms 3 and 4, 2018. ERO made an overall judgment about how well school leaders were determining PLD priorities and evaluating the impact of PLD.

> Leaders in nearly half of the 242 schools determined PLD priorities well, and considered the impact for teachers.
>
> Rural schools were less likely to be doing well (these were often full primary or composite, small or very small, with recent staff or leadership change, or first time principal).

Strong leadership was the determining feature in schools where there was a learning culture. This supported teaching as inquiry and evaluative thinking. The extent to which teachers' knowledge and practice improved depended on how well schools identified and managed their PLD priorities. The involvement of trustees, principals, senior leaders and teachers helped to focus the school's PLD plan on improving teaching practice and student outcomes.

Most school leaders used data to determine PLD priorities and were aware of the impact of PLD on teachers' confidence and knowledge of curriculum content. However, they had collected little evidence about the impact of PLD on shifts in teaching practices, and if and how those led to improved student outcomes.

In most schools, **internal evaluation was not learner outcome-focused**, but was more about inputs and outputs. Some schools also lacked a plan to ensure continuity when there was senior leadership or staff change which had implications for teacher learning.

+ SCHOOL LEADERS WERE GENERALLY STRATEGIC IN THEIR PLD CHOICES

» most leaders used a variety of qualitative and quantitative data to inform their decisions

» data used was mostly robust

» where in-school data literacy was weaker, leaders generally relied on external advice or support

» Kāhui Ako priorities often influenced schools' PLD choices but only a few schools relied completely on the Kāhui Ako PLD

» about half of the schools' PLD plan had some link to other planning or priorities such as the annual plan

» a few schools made PLD choices based purely on word of mouth, hunches or availability

» a few schools had not accessed any external PLD.

➕ LEADERS WERE LESS LIKELY TO SYSTEMATICALLY EVALUATE THE IMPACT OF THEIR PLD ON LEARNER OUTCOMES

» about one-third of schools had not considered the impact of PLD, or had only anecdotal evidence of impact

» internal evaluation tended to be more about inputs* and outputs**, than outcomes

» examples of impact were often about teacher confidence and knowledge, without looking at what this meant for learners

» strengthened professional relationships and collaboration was a common unintended, but positive consequence of PLD.

Inputs refers to the means used to achieve educational objectives such as teachers and financial resources.

**Outputs refers to the direct results associated with inputs such as the number of PLD workshops teachers attend.*

➕ MORE, SPECIFIC DATA LITERACY AND INTERNAL EVALUATION SUPPORT/PLD IS NEEDED

» internal evaluation was not well understood; guidance is needed on the what and how

» some teachers learnt about internal evaluation incidentally through other PLD

» many teachers want to learn more about assessment, data use and internal evaluation

» collaborative sense making could mitigate against issues like staff/leadership changes, as knowledge, understanding and responsibility is shared.

Schools need specific support in data literacy and internal evaluation

A good system for internal evaluation provides a framework for schools to know what is working, and where school leaders should place their future efforts. Analysis of student achievement data and timely feedback on teaching practice are key evidence bases from which to plan and manage effective PLD.

In particular, schools need to know what data to collect and how to analyse it to understand what it is telling them.

Schools need support to strengthen their knowledge and use of data to inform their PLD priorities. With improved data literacy, schools should be better able to use internal evaluation to identify the impact of PLD on teaching practices and student outcomes.

Access and poor planning were constraints

Access to PLD was often a challenge for small and rural schools. Costs of travelling to PLD and finding a relieving teacher often had a negative impact on these schools' limited resources. Often, school leaders chose in-school PLD with an external facilitator as a way to overcome this. However, the lack of or unavailability of an external facilitator was sometimes a constraint. Frequent staff changes also had implications for continuity of teacher learning and consolidating changes in teaching practice.

About one-third of schools did not have a PLD plan or their PLD plan was not robust and/or linked to strategic priorities. The quality of PLD planning is an area where schools need more support.

Recommendations

It is essential for schools to understand the impact of PLD on improving teaching practice and student outcomes.

ERO recommends the Ministry of Education work with PLD providers to:

» provide greater support for data literacy and internal evaluation of PLD in schools

» provide clearer communication about eligibility for locally funded PLD

» improve accessibility of PLD for rural and/or small schools.

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